



John Muir Correspondence (PDFs)

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**Letter from Asa K. McIlhaney to John Muir, 1912 Dec 21.**

Asa K. McIlhaney

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Bath, Pennsylvania,  
Dec. 21, 1912.

Mr. John Muir,  
Martinez, Cal.

My dear Sir, -  
I have just spent a delightful afternoon in reading your Reminiscences now running in the Atlantic Monthly, and look forward with pleasure for the forthcoming issues. I have been an ardent lover and student of nature all my life, consequently I cannot help but appreciate your articles.

My home is in the eastern part of Pennsylvania, in a section of country settled by the Ulster-Scot as early as 1728. These people were very religious and patriotic and furnished Washington with many of his best officers during the American Revolution. As frontiersmen they continually pushed the Indian westward, cleared the forests, and being fond

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of nature left many of the old trees stand, so that today the descendants take off their hats in the presence of these living monuments.

They generally planted a few white pine trees near the house, a buttonwood to shade the spring house, and aid in keeping the milk cool, which was appreciated by Peter Kalm who visited here in 1749. The oak, ash, hickory, locust, chestnut, sassafras, birch, and beech predominate today.

at present, I am engaged in writing an article entitled "Authors & Trees", in which I purpose naming the favorite trees of many distinguished men and women of Europe and America. This is taken from the autograph letters written to me years ago by the poets themselves. I would crave your indulgence long enough to say that Holmes, Trowbridge, Rexford and Mrs. H. B. Stowe chose the graceful New England elm. Emerson, Whittier, and Randall the author of "My Maryland", held first thoughts



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for the pine. Jean Ingelow favored the oak - "the peculiar tree of my nation". So did Thomas Hughes "because it is somehow connected with the British constitution". Stoddard and Markham tend toward the same.

To Lowell the early buds of spring had a great meaning and, as you know, he wrote charmingly of the elm, oak and birch, but he loved the hornbeam best, - "the one he planted in childhood, whose trunk has now (1891) a girth of eight feet, and sustains a vast dome of verdure, the haunts of birds and bees and of thoughts as cheery as they".

S. F. Smith author of "America" preferred the blood beech which is celebrated in the first line of the first Eclogue of Virgil,

Howells likes mulberries and boys and says there cannot be too many of either,

Ex-President Roosevelt writes that the hickory is such a distinctly American tree that he is especially fond of it.



John Burroughs is closest in preference to the sugar maple, yet he cautions us not to forget the hidden so pleasing in form and foliage and such a friend to the honey bee.

I read that the sugar maple was very interesting to you when a boy, and may I ask the question, "What is your favorite tree today?"

Living within sight of the Blue or Kittatinny mountains, it is but natural that I should be drawn to them, especially to that portion between the Lehigh Water Gap and the Delaware Water Gap.

These mountains are not as grand and glorious as your Sierras, still they are lovable. Pursh was here in 1807, on a tour of investigation and was especially interested in the *Pyrolas*. The Heath family is well represented. The *Rhododendron* and laurel grow in profusion. The large white globe flower, the Indian dipper, the round-leaf sundew, the pretty little *Rhodora*, yellow moccasins, are a few of the rarer plants.



Back in these mountains you often meet the ginseng hunter, both species being found - the *Panax quinquefolium* and *Panax tri.*

The great Audubon passed through this section in the autumn of 1829, on his way to the Pine Swamp, at which place "he was disappointed at the extraordinary scarcity of birds, but surprised at the plentiful deer and occasional elk, bears, wild turkeys, pheasants and grouse, while trout were so plentiful that I was made weary with pulling from the rivulets the sparkling fish allured by the struggles of the common grasshopper."

The elk and wild turkeys have become extinct, but the other game mentioned remains. The mountain streams are alive with schools of the "speckled beauties".

Sir Thomas Lyle also found this part of Pennsylvania interesting, coming here in Oct. 1842. Pardon me for writing so long a letter. But I would like to know your favorite tree and your favorite Dierra flowers.

Should you ever visit this locality, I would be delighted to conduct you through the world-famed Delaware Water Gap where flows the historic Delaware river. Sincerely Yours,

Asa K. McIlhenny.